



Australian Bureau of Statistics

Speech points - Australian Statistician, Mr Brian Pink - 2006 Census results launch, 27 June 2007

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- Today we celebrate the first instalment of the dividends that will flow over the next few years from the investment that Australians made in August last year when they completed their 2006 Census form.
- This first release of data reminds us of what the Census is all about, and that is putting vital information back into the hands of users right across Australia
 - enabling us to look at how as a nation we are changing
 - and informing a very wide range of decisions about investments – both public and private – in services, infrastructure and facilities.
- And this is only the first release – there is so much more to come. Today's data is the start of a rich flow of information from our Census, and over the next 12 months the full value of this national count will be realised as more and more facts and figures are released.
- The real power of the Census is that it provides snapshots at all levels of society, enabling us to look at the nation as a whole, at individual states or at different regions, right down to community level.
 - People in all walks of life are able to use that data for a host of worthwhile purposes, whether they are governments, businesses, community groups or students doing assignments.
 - The Census is the definitive source of information about the nation's most important resource, its people.
- The Census is also a fundamental building block for official statistics in Australia. Census data plays a key role in many aspects of our democracy and our economy – from economic policy development, to determining equitable electoral boundaries, to the allocation of funding, particularly between the Commonwealth and the states.
- The Census underpins our population estimates, particularly the estimated resident population, and complements many of the surveys we conduct that give depth and richness to the national statistical collections.
- Good decisions are based on good information, and the Census is a very powerful source of high quality information for a wide range of public and private decisions:

- where we build our schools and hospitals
- our infrastructure development for roads, airports, etc, to
- private investment decisions, such as where retail outlets and other services are located.
- When you look at the enormous amount of analysis, research and investment that relies on Census data, the Census represents extraordinary value for Australians.
 - In fact the monetary cost of the Census is **less than one cent per day** for each Australian, a cost that compares favourably with those in peer nations.
- The success of each Census of course depends on the cooperation of the Australian Community and I want today to particularly express the gratitude of the ABS to the Australian public for their willing participation in the Census.
 - Whilst it's true that completing the Census form is a legal obligation, in practice the Census is successful because the community chooses to participate voluntarily
 - and that goes to the heart of the trust and confidence the community has in its national statistical agency.
 - We at ABS place enormous value on maintaining that trust in all we do.
 - It is important today to recognise the contribution of the tens of thousands of Census collectors who helped us, and the 1000 or so Melbournians who helped us process the data in this very room and building where we are today.
- For the first time, the Census output will be predominantly Internet-based.
 - Today's data is, as I speak, being made available free of charge on the ABS website.
 - Subsequent releases – indeed the majority of the 2006 Census of Population and Housing results– will be available free on the Internet.
 - Thanks to our new MapStats and QuickStats online facilities, you can now access your local information, or map your neighbourhood, much more quickly than in previous censuses.
- We're obviously very proud of the fact that for the first time the community was offered the ability to participate in the Census online, and whilst only around ten percent took up that option on this occasion, it was extremely well received by those who participated.
 - This time the eCensus was a fairly low key part of the Census, but for the next Census in 2011 we will certainly draw people's attention to the eCensus and encourage those who feel comfortable doing so, to use it.
 - It's not only an easy way for people to complete the Census
 - but it also has benefits for ABS in terms of field operations and in processing.
- As I am sure many of you already appreciate, the Census is an extraordinary undertaking. In fact I believe it is the largest peace time undertaking we conduct in Australia and we do it

every five years. Key tasks involve

- distributing the Census forms around Australia
 - arranging their delivery and collection to every household
 - getting those forms brought back securely from all parts of the continent to our processing centre
 - then the major process of capturing the information and converting that raw data into statistical outputs, with a great deal of quality assurance.
- It's fair to say that the 2006 Census was in many ways the most challenging ever carried out. Conducting the Census is proving to be more challenging each time and I believe that the 2011 Census could be much harder again to conduct. Our problems last year foreshadow the likely substantial difficulties ahead.
 - People's lives seem to be busier these days, and two-income households are more common than in the past (the income rich, time poor dilemma).
 - Coupled with the growth in high rise apartments this means we have to be more innovative to contact people at home and gain access to deliver and pick up Census forms.
 - There is also an increasing trend for people to have more than one home, raising the issue for Census field staff of whether dwellings are occupied or vacant.
 - In addition, the full employment situation this time around made it more difficult to recruit and keep our census collecting staff.
- Notwithstanding all of these challenges, overall the 2006 Census was highly successful and produced valuable, high quality data and a number of our innovations this time around have received strong endorsement from various quarters.
- In particular
 - ABS was proud to win the 2007 e-Government Award in Excellence for the eCensus
 - a national award from the Spatial Sciences Institute for field maps
 - and a Community Action Network award in Queensland for our efforts in counting the homeless.
- In our planning for the 2011 Census, we will be looking at ways of dealing with the various Census challenges, including an expanded eCensus.
- Although technology will continue to play its part going forward, I think that the way the Census focuses on a particular time in our nation's history, and encourages us all to stand up and be counted, is vital to our society.
- The Census has, and I believe it will continue to have, a special place in the psyche of Australia
 - it is a mechanism that is celebrated on a national level, it is one project that everybody can participate in, and it is a project in which I think the vast majority of

Australians feel they are making a contribution to their country.

- I urge you all to visit the ABS website at the earliest opportunity, to find out all the fascinating facts about your community and your nation, to enjoy the results of the Census and to prosper in putting them to use.

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